

General Order

Houston Police Department



ISSUE DATE:

May 20, 2020

NO.

200-41

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 200-41, dated June 19, 2015

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT PRESENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET

POLICY

Information or material posted to the Internet on a website (a connected group of pages on the World Wide Web regarded as a single entity) or on a social media platform (e.g., Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram) may be considered part of the public domain even if access is restricted, or it may be geotagged, and as such, privacy of the information should not be assumed. Photographs and other material posted to websites, social media, or other applications may become the property of that website or provider.

While employees are allowed to maintain a web page and make comments or postings on a social media platform, this General Order outlines the department's right to regulate the speech and actions of its employees in certain circumstances.

Employees shall refer to General Order 600-25, **Social Media Use for Investigations**, for policy regarding the use of social media for investigations.

This General Order applies to all employees.

1 DEPARTMENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, WEBSITES, AND THE INTERNET

Only the Chief of Police may approve an official department website or other official department presence on social media.

The Office of Public Affairs shall exercise oversight of each official department website and social media site to ensure the content information and postings are correct and appropriate, and to ensure adherence to federal, state, and local laws, department policies, and City of Houston Executive Order 1-18. This includes, but is not limited to, adherence to copyright and privacy laws, records retention requirements, the Texas Public Information Act, and information security policies established by the department.

Division commanders who want to establish an official department website or social media account shall contact the Office of Public Affairs. Public Affairs will provide the requestor with the Appendix A- *Social Media Site Proposal* form from City of Houston Executive Order 1-18 as well as reference material to assist in completing the form. The requesting division commander shall ensure the form is completed, reviewed and approved by the appropriate assistant chief (or executive assistant chief) before returning it to the Office of Public Affairs.

The Office of Public Affairs, after consultation with the Office of Technology Services and the Office of Planning and Data Governance, will forward the *Social Media Site Proposal* with any recommendations of approval or denial from this social media committee to the Chief of Police. Proposals authorized by the Chief of Police shall be forwarded to the Director of the Mayor's Office of Communications for review and approval.

Divisions authorized by the Chief of Police and approved by the Mayor's Office of Communications to administer a website or social media account will adhere to the Office of Public Affairs Standard Operating Procedures for Website Administration and/or Social Media Administration.

2 EMPLOYEE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET

Employees who post or allow to be posted information or material to the Internet or on social media or in any publicly accessible communication application or medium are subject to the General Orders at all times. Actions taken while on or off duty and that violate any General Order shall be subject to appropriate review and possible disciplinary action.

Employees are not barred from presenting themselves on the Internet or on social media as Houston Police Department employees. However, when posting information or material to the Internet or on social media or in any publicly accessible communication application or medium, employees shall carefully consider whether or not to identify themselves as employees of the Houston Police Department or members of law enforcement. Any information posted may remain accessible to the public for an indefinite length of time even if access is restricted, and this may impact open records requests, courtroom credibility, potential citizen contacts, or the ability to seek and obtain an undercover assignment within the department.

3 RESTRICTIONS

Except as required by official duties, employees shall not knowingly post or allow to be posted to the Internet or on social media or in any publicly accessible communication application or medium:

- a. Photographs or anything depicting or regarding themselves or other employees in compromising or inappropriate locations or circumstances.
- b. Anything that would identify an employee or another person in law enforcement as a coworker, police officer, police employee, or member of law enforcement, without permission from that person.
- c. Anything identifying, depicting, or regarding employees or other persons in law enforcement, on or off duty, who work in an undercover capacity.

Undercover officers shall not post or allow to be posted images of themselves on any Internet or social media site, whether the image is of the undercover officer in an on-duty or off-duty capacity. Additionally, undercover officers shall not identify themselves as police officers or as Houston Police Department employees on any Internet or social media site. Undercover officers who engage in any of these activities may be considered for reassignment within the division or elsewhere in the department.

- d. Anything depicting or regarding an employee without permission from that person.
- e. Anything depicting or regarding City of Houston property or policy, the public release of which would compromise national, local, or employee security or the department mission.

- f. Anything that would produce a reasonable expectation of harm to the reputation of the Police Department, the City of Houston, or any City employee.
- g. False, derogatory, offensive, or inappropriate comments, material, or depictions regarding any coworker or other City employee.
- h. Anything false, derogatory, offensive, or inappropriate regarding their official duties or any department or City policy.
- i. Anything depicting or regarding an ongoing law enforcement or City of Houston investigation, including investigations that have not resulted in a final adjudication.
- j. Anything that relates to official department activities including, but not limited to, crime scenes, potential evidence, witnesses, incident reports, or personnel performing official duties.
- k. Confidential or privileged information or material made available to them by their capacity as police officers or their position within the Police Department.
- l. Anything appearing to be, but that is not officially sanctioned by the Police Department or the City of Houston.
- m. Anything appearing to use a City of Houston employee's official position for personal profit or business interests, to endorse a political candidate, platform, or commercial product, or to participate in political activity.
- n. Anything that would attribute personal statements or opinions to the Police Department or the City of Houston.



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Chief of Police